

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

Submission No: 110
Submitted by: Anti-Poverty Week
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:



**Submission to Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee, Qld Parliament
regarding Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024**

Anti-Poverty Week submits that changes to legislation through the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 will not make communities safer. The changes do not address the causes of youth offending but rather, embed children in criminal justice management and put them on the conveyor belt into adult prison.

We would encourage the Queensland Government to instead provide pathways for children to flourish and not to be caught in that vicious cycle.

Children detained in the youth justice system come from the poorest and most disadvantaged communities where there is grossly unequal access to resources including to education, training and employment. These places are significantly more likely to be First Nations' communities (AIHW 2024).

Most of these children have experienced early abuse, violence and trauma, systemic racism and discrimination. They are likely to have unsupported mental and cognitive disability, be in out of home care, have early police contact (usually as a victim), early alcohol and other drug use, experience homelessness and have very poor education (AIHW 2024; McCausland and Baldry 2023). Poverty is a fundamental structural driver of children's offending.

The response should be to prevent these children accumulating these negative predictors in their lives, not wait until they are caught in the criminal web. Allen, Homel et al's (2024) work shows how youth offending can be reduced dramatically in highly disadvantaged communities in Queensland, with early prevention programs in pre-school. SureStart hubs in the UK show very good long term educational outcomes for the poorest children given early education and family support and these reduce contact with criminal justice (IFS 2024).

There is no evidence that using adult criminal legal processes for children improves outcomes, rather the opposite. Belgium, Portugal and Nordic countries that have the lowest youth offending and the highest positive outcomes for children also have strong children's rights, welfare, health, education and service supports from very early in life and adhere to 14 or 15 as the age of criminal responsibility.

Queensland already has tough youth justice laws and yet this has not addressed youth justice issues or led to improved outcomes for children and young people in contact with the youth justice system.

We urge the Queensland Government to not pass the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 and instead address the issues of poverty and disadvantage and other causes of youth offending.

References:

AIHW (2024) Youth Justice <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/youth-justice>

Allen, J., Homel, R., Vasco, D. & Freiberg, K. (2024). The impact of a preschool communication program and comprehensive family support on serious youth offending: New findings from the Pathways to Prevention Project. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti77567>

AIHW (ud) <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6cdb6022-91da-4fd3-98ec-21d29f5db44c/juv-95-yjfs-74-aust-int.pdf.aspx>

IFS (2024) <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/short-and-medium-term-impacts-sure-start-educational-outcomes>